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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SARAJEVO 001911

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [BK](#)

SUBJECT: BOSNIA - TIHIC OFFERS HAND OF COMPROMISE, BUT  
DODIK SMACKS IT DOWN

REF: A. A. SARAJEVO 1899

[1](#)B. B. SARAJEVO 1520

[1](#)C. C. SARAJEVO 1862

Classified By: Michael J. Murphy. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In a December 26 press conference, Party of Democratic Action (SDA) chairman Sulejman Tihic called on Bosniaks to abandon the politics of victimhood and stressed that compromise with Serbs and Croats is the only path to a stable Bosnia. Tihic also attacked rival Bosniak politician Haris Silajdzic and his Party for BiH (SBiH) for their "all or nothing" approach to politics, which has played into the hands of Serb nationalists seeking to strengthen Republika Srpska (RS) at the expense of the state. A number of RS politicians and key SDA officials welcomed Tihic's comments, but in a December 28 interview, RS PM Milorad Dodik dismissed Tihic's remarks as "a trap," asserted that Tihic was no different than Silajdzic, and speculated -- "hypothetically" -- that an RS with "independent capacities" would develop much faster than an RS inside Bosnia. Tihic's speech showed courage and was a refreshing aberration from the nationalist rhetoric that has dominated Bosnian politics over the last two years. If he sticks to his guns, this attitude -- coupled with reciprocal gestures on the part of Dodik and the Serbs -- could begin to reverse Bosnia's dangerous political backsliding. It will be tougher for Tihic to sustain Bosniak support for compromise, though, if Dodik continues his rhetorical attacks on the state and refuses to compromise on issues of importance to Bosniaks. End Summary.

Tihic Urges Bosniaks to Stop Whining and Compromise

[1](#)2. (SBU) In SDA's traditional New Year's Eve press conference, which took place on December 26, party chairman Tihic encouraged Bosniaks to abandon their "victim philosophy and self-pity," declaring that "precisely because of the victims, their families, and future generations, we have to work more on resolving the problems of the present and think of the future." He added that Bosniaks cannot expect the USG, the international community, OHR, and Islamic and other countries to resolve Bosnia's problems. "Those times have passed," Tihic warned, stressing that the country's politicians must now "assume responsibility and do our job." In this context, Tihic noted that it was incumbent upon the Bosniaks to strike compromises with Croats, Serbs, and "others who live in our country" in order to "strengthen and maintain Bosnia-Herzegovina as a multiethnic and multireligious state of equal peoples and citizens." He added, though, that OHR's presence in Bosnia and the Bonn Powers would be necessary until the PIC's "five plus two"

agenda and constitutional reform were fully implemented, warning that OHR's early departure could result in "confrontations and divisions." (Note: It has long been SDA's policy that OHR remain until constitutional reform is complete. End Note.)

#### Tihic Calls Out Silajdzic

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13. (SBU) Tihic cited the Prud Agreement (Ref A), which he helped broker, as evidence of his party's commitment to improving the situation in Bosnia by bringing Serbs and Croats to the negotiating table. He also outlined specific elements of Prud, explaining how the compromises he had reached protected the core interests of Bosniaks even as they made progress possible for the country as a whole. At the same time, Tihic portrayed Silajdzic and SBiH as destructive political forces and accused them of working against Bosniak interests. He stated that these politicians "are not offering realistically better solutions; all they do is offer agreements with themselves. They have not delivered on their promises." He added that "over two years of their mandate have passed, but what is left of their motto -- 100 Percent BiH -- is only 100 Percent RS!" (Note: "100 Percent BiH" is SBiH's motto and election campaign slogan. End Note.) In a December 28 follow-on interview for the television network OBN, Tihic specified that SBiH, which billed itself as the strongest advocate for Bosniak interests, was actually working against these interests because of the party's "all or nothing" approach to issues. He added that SBiH lacked the capacity to compromise with anyone outside its own party.

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SDA, according to Tihic, was in coalition with SBiH only because "the people wanted them to be."

#### SDA and Some Serbs Applaud, Silajdzic Boos

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14. (SBU) SDA VP Bakir Izetbegovic, traditionally an opponent of many of Tihic's policies, told the pro-Bosniak daily Dnevni Avaz on December 26 that he was certain Tihic's statements would garner full support from within the party. He declared that "we should focus on the future, and we should be prepared to forgive certain things due to the future. Because of the future we also must not forget who we are and what happened to us, because the one who forgets history is forced to repeat it." Some Banja Luka politicians on December 26 also praised Tihic. Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) Main Board member Milorad Zivkovic called Tihic's speech "wise and brave," adding that SDA's professed change of course for Bosniak politics could have positive implications for the EU accession process. Party of Democratic Progress (PDP) chairman Mladen Ivanic echoed Zivkovic's accolades, also calling Tihic "wise and brave," but Serb Democratic Party (SDS) leader Mladen Bosic noted that Tihic's concept could not come to fruition without the staunch support of the other Bosniak parties and the entire SDA. Predictably, Silajdzic in a December 28 press conference slammed Tihic for "insulting the Bosniak people" and declared that the Prud Agreement represents a "factual recognition of the results of genocide and ethnic cleansing."

#### Dodik Throws Cold Water on Tihic's Overture

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15. (SBU) In contrast to Tihic's call for Bosniaks to begin the painful journey away from a focus on wartime politics and to make the compromises with Serbs and Croats necessary to benefit all Bosnian citizens, Dodik on December 28 publicly dismissed Tihic's statements as "a trap." Echoing his September 18 interview for Radio Free Europe (Ref B), he compared Tihic to Silajdzic, arguing that both politicians were pursuing the same objective -- the elimination of the RS -- but through different means. Dodik declared that his duty as RS Prime Minister was "to ensure that Tihic does not

succeed" in stripping the RS of its powers. Dodik boasted that the RS today was more powerful than in the past, claiming that because of his policies the RS "enjoys dignity and is recognized ... as the best organized part" of Bosnia, warning that "only an institutionally strong Srpska" can prevent "the disappearance of the Serbs" from Bosnia. In the same interview, Dodik speculated about an RS future outside Bosnia, noting that self-determination was the supreme principle of the UN, and that "whether it will be necessary to apply it here or not will be left to the coming future." Though Dodik was quoted to add that he was "committed to the Dayton Peace Agreement," he argued that the reforms implemented in Bosnia since Dayton "did not bring anything good to the RS." Returning to a theme he has embraced in the past, Dodik predicted that "if the RS had its own independent capacities ... its progress and development would have been much faster."

Comment

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16. (C) Tihic's December 26 speech was, in many respects, a welcome and courageous break from the usual nationalist-tinged Bosnian politics. It was certainly the first time in a long time that any political leader has been brave enough to tell his constituents something they didn't want to hear. Tihic's statements present a risk to a politician struggling to maintain control of restive factions within his own party and woo a Bosniak populace looking for leadership capable of protecting its interests against what it perceives as a threat from the escalating anti-Bosniak Serb nationalism that Dodik represents. Silajdzic will undoubtedly do everything he can to discredit Tihic and paint him as a dupe of the Serbs, who want to, as Silajdzic often puts it, "realize Milosevic's project" in Bosnia. There are signs that Silajdzic's criticisms of Tihic and Prud are beginning to strike a chord among average Bosniaks. Silajdzic's job has been made easier by Dodik, who recently attacked "Muslim" judges on the State Court (Ref C), and who was quick to dismiss Tihic's speech and speculate, once

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again, about an RS future outside Bosnia. However much Dodik qualifies such speculations, his comments -- coupled with his anti-state rhetoric and public defiance of Sarajevo, OHR, and the international community -- fuels fears among Bosniaks about his long-term intentions. Tihic has taken a big risk with Prud and now with the December 26 speech, and his attempt to restore the middle ground in Bosnian politics will depend on his skills navigating narrow waters between the Scylla of Dodik's Serb nationalism and the Charybdis of Silajdzic's Bosniak nationalism.

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